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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000908

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SUBJECT: KNU LETTER TO SPDC APPEALS FOR PEACE

REF: RANGOON 768

Classified By: CDA, a.i. Karl E. Stoltz for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (U) SUMMARY: The President of the Karen National Union (KNU) recently wrote a letter to SPDC Senior General Than Shwe proposing peace talks and a political, vice military, solution to their conflict. The KNU views the 2004 "gentlemen's agreement" cease-fire, brokered by KNU General Bo Mya and former PM Khin Nyunt, as an accord between the KNU and the SPDC, not between two individuals. The letter disavows any KNU involvement in a recent robbery and the triple bombings in Rangoon in May. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) A June 30 "open" letter from KNU President Saw Ba Thin Sein to Senior General Than Shwe was recently made available to Emboffs. Likely a response to issues raised by a mediation team that met in mid-June with KNU leaders (reftel), the letter refers to talks between former PM Khin Nyunt and KNU's General Bo Mya in January 2004 that concluded with a "gentlemen's" cease-fire agreement. The KNU, according to the letter, considers that this agreement was between the SPDC and the KNU, not just between the two individuals, and urges the SPDC honor the arrangement.

3. (U) The KNU letter refers to GOB allegations that the KNU was behind the armed robbery of a convoy near Ye in April and the May triple bombings in Rangoon, and states that such false accusations tarnish the reputation of the KNU and only serve to undermine peace efforts. The KNU categorically rejects any involvement in these incidents.

4. (U) The letter concludes by stating that over 50 years of war proves that differences between the ethnic groups and the GOB cannot be solved by war and require political solutions. Saw Ba Thin Sein then appeals to Than Shwe to declare a nationwide cease-fire; release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi; and commence a tripartite dialogue among the regime, the democratic opposition, and the ethnics--as called for by the U.N.

5. (C) COMMENT: Sources close to the KNU report that the GOB has increased its military presence near KNU-controlled areas recently. Some skirmishes have occurred resulting in several casualties. Ethnic Karen sources have admitted that they lack sufficient ammunition for a protracted conflict. Therefore, the KNU seems eager to strike the best cease-fire deal they can with the GOB and end their decades-old conflict. END COMMENT.
Stoltz